

Message Text

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ACTION IO-14

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAG: WHO
SUBJECT: INDIAN CHIEF DELEGATE TO WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

REF: NEW DELHI 6752

1. HEALTH MINISTER RAJ NARAIN PLANS TO HEAD GOI DELEGATION TO WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY, LEAVING HERE MAY 6. FOLLOWING IS BIO SKETCH REQUESTED IN CONNECTION WITH LUNCHEON TO BE HOSTED BY SECRETARY CALIFANO.

2. RAJ NARAIN IS CURRENTLY BEST KNOWN AS THE MAN WHO DEFEATED INDIRA GANDHI IN HER HOME CONSTITUENCY IN THE 1977 ELECTIONS. HE IS A HIGHLY IDIOSYNCRATIC AND CONTROVERSIAL POLITICIAN, WHO STILL WIELDS CONSIDERABLE POWER IN QUESTIONS RELATING TO HIS HOME AREA OF EASTERN UTTAR PRADESH BUT WHOSE UNPREDICTABLE BEHAVIOR AND OFFBEAT VIEWS ON MODERN LIFE MAKE HIM A "CHARACTER" WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT.

3. RAJ NARAIN WAS BORN IN 1917 IN A VILLAGE NEAR BANARAS. HE HOLDS A LAW DEGREE FROM BANARAS HINDU UNIVERSITY, BUT HAS BEEN IN POLITICS HIS ENTIRE ADULT LIFE. HE BEGAN HIS POLITICAL CAREER IN THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT. HE HAS BEEN

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ASSOCIATED WITH THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND ITS PREDECESSOR SINCE THE 1940S. HE PRIDES HIMSELF ON HIS ACTIVIST STANCE, FIRST AGAINST THE BRITISH AND LATER IN AGITATING FOR, AS HIS OFFICIAL BIOGRAPHY PUTS IT, "REMOVAL OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DISPARITIES" - ON BEHALF OF STUDENTS, LABORERS, "UNTOUCHABLES", AND PEASANTS. HE FIRST RAN AGAINST MRS. GANDHI IN THE 1971 ELECTIONS, AND FOLLOWING HIS DEFEAT

SUCCESSFULLY BROUGHT LEGAL ACTION AGAINST HER FOR ILLEGAL ELECTION PRACTICES. HE WAS IMPRISONED DURING THE EMERGENCY AND RELEASED SHORTLY BEFORE THE MARCH 1977 ELECTIONS.

4. AS HEALTH MINISTER, RAJ NARAIN FIRST ATTRACTED ATTENTION BECAUSE OF HIS UNORTHODOX VIEWS ON FAMILY PLANNING. IN THE HEAT OF THE BACKLASH AGAINST THE HIGH-HANDED EMERGENCY FAMILY PLANNING CAMPAIGN, NARAIN STATED PUBLICLY THAT THE BEST METHODS OF BIRTH CONTROL WERE CELIBACY AND ABSTINENCE, AND THAT STERILIZATION WAS "INHUMAN". THIS LATTER STATEMENT WAS LATER AMENDED TO READ "FORCED STERILIZATION". HE EVEN CHANGED THE NAME OF HIS MINISTRY TO "HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE," DELETING THE TERM "FAMILY PLANNING" WHICH HE ARGUED HAD BECOME TAINTED BY THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM. IN THE INTERVENING YEAR, HE HAS RECOGNIZED THE IMPORTANCE FOR INDIA OF CURBING POPULATION GROWTH, BUT HE REMAINS BECAUSE OF HIS EARLIER STATEMENTS SOMETHING OF A SYMBOL OF A DO-NOTHING ATTITUDE ON THE POPULATION PROBLEM.

5. PERHAPS HIS MOST CONSTRUCTIVE CONTRIBUTION AS HEALTH MINISTER HAS BEEN HIS INITIATION OF A SCHEME TO BLANKET INDIA WITH "COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS" - RURAL RESIDENTS CHOSEN BY THEIR COMMUNITIES AND GIVEN THREE MONTH'S TRAINING IN RUDIMENTARY PREVENTIONAL HEALTH CARE. THIS CONCEPT HAS BEEN AROUND FOR SOME TIME, BUT NARAIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PERSONNEL SAW TO IT THAT TRAINING COURSES WERE INSTITUTED TO COVER ABOUT ONE-FIFTH OF THE COUNTRY IN THE FIRST YEAR OF OPERATION. THIS PROGRAM IS TESTIMONY TO RAJ NARAIN'S DEEP COMMITMENT TO RURAL HEALTH CARE.

6. RAJ NARAIN PASSED WORD TO US ABOUT A YEAR AGO THAT HE WAS ANXIOUS TO VISIT THE U.S., AND SECRETARY CALIFANO WROTE LAST OCTOBER EXTENDING AN INVITATION. NARAIN RESPONDED AT THE TIME THAT HE WOULD BE IN TOUCH WITH US TO FIX THE SCHEDULE, BUT WE HAVE HEARD NOTHING FURTHER ON THIS SINCE EARLY NOVEMBER. HE HAD A BRIEF UNSCHEDULED MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CARTER DURING HIS VISIT TO INDIA LAST JANUARY.

7. RAJ NARAIN IS MARRIED AND HAS THREE SONS. HIS ENGLISH IS ADEQUATE.
GOHEEN

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